
STORIES FROM THE HOME FRONT

GLADYS HRITSKO

Gladys Jolly Hritsko, 1919–2010, grew up in the Green Lake area, then moved to 121 Howard St. with her parents and was a 1938 graduate of Ripon High School. Hritsko worked at Ripon Knitting Works, the current site of Ripon Drug, 308 Watson St. She was just a couple of weeks shy of 22 years old when Pearl Harbor was bombed in December 1941 and America joined into WWII.

On a Monday morning while working at the Knitting Works making socks and gloves for the Army, she was handed a stack of mittens to work on. She told her boss, “I’m not fixing ’em, I am going to join the Army.” Hritsko left her job that morning with no notice, walked the three blocks to the train station and left Ripon traveling to Milwaukee to enlist, with only \$5 in her pocket.

Gladys enlisted under the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC). Congress instated the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) in May 1942. WAAC was reorganized in July 1943 as the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), an official part of the U.S. Army. This gave the WAC’s the same rank, privileges and benefits as their male counterparts. Over the course of WWII, 150,000 women served in the WAAC and WAC working in non-combat jobs.

In 2005, Hritsko was interviewed at age 86 by history professor Robert C. Daniels for the book *World War II in Mid-America*. In the interview, she reflected on her time in basic training at Camp Chaffe in Monticello, Arkansas:

“We thought we were in jail,” she said of the basic training. “We had guards — we had the whole ball of wax. So that was a very new experience for me. They did throw the kitchen sink at us ... The officers were looking us over to see if we could handle anything connected with the war. That means being shipped overseas, you had to accept that.”

— Gladys



Hritsko served in the Army Service Training Command Engineer Corps. She trained for six weeks in Des Moines, Iowa at the Motor Transport School and worked in Ames, Iowa and also Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Hritsko drove the large trucks and Jeeps. WWII ended Sept. 2, 1945, but Hritsko was not discharged until January 1946. She returned to her job at the Ripon Knitting Works.

She then married John Hritsko (1915–1974), a fellow Army veteran originally from Pennsylvania who she had dated during the war. Hritsko told her husband that she would only live in Ripon, so they made their home at 515 West Fond du Lac St., and had three sons and one daughter.
